



Experience of Body Dissatisfaction among Men and Women across Life Span

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Until recently, studies investigating the phenomenon of body image have concentrated on the female population. As a result, the assessment tools used to assess girls and/or women's body image experiences may not be relevant to boys and/or men. Studies indicate that Body dissatisfaction (BD) among adult men is not as straightforward as it is among adult women. While studies have consistently found that the majority of women across all age groups strive for a slimmer body regardless of their body mass index (BMI), the relationship between BMI and BD is not linear but quadratic among males (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). The reason for this difference is that men express dissatisfaction when they are either under or over their perceived ideal weight (Presnel, Bearman &, Stice , 2004), and also because while some adult men seem to strive for a slimmer or lean body, other men want a larger, more muscular body (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Studies investigating BD typically address the strategies used to lose weight and questions regarding gaining weight or increasing muscles have not been asked (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Consequently, a probable bias that adolescent girls experience higher levels of dissatisfaction than adolescent boys may exist (Tiggemann, 2006). Furthermore, a study by Gupta & Schork (1993) found that although both adult men and women demonstrated a correlation between aging-related concerns regarding appearance and drive for thinness; the older males reported lower BD and drive for muscularity. Based on the literature review, this study investigates common variables such as self-esteem, gender and age that have been associated to body dissatisfaction across both adult men and women using questions that are gender neutral.

Hypotheses

Based on prior studies that have investigated gender differences in BD and related topics, the following dominant relationships (hypotheses) were tested: (1) Gender will have an effect on BD (H1); (2) gender and self-esteem are expected to be positively correlated (H2); (3) increase in age will predict increase in self-esteem (H3); (4) increase in age will predict decrease in BD (H4).

Method

Data was collected utilizing a self-administered online survey. The Rosenberg's self-esteem (RSE) inventory was included in the questionnaire. The responses on RSE were measured on a 5 point Likert scale ranging between 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. To assess BD the questionnaire posed "Have you ever experienced dissatisfaction with your appearance?" and the responses were measured on a Likert scale 1= never, 2= rarely, 3=sometimes, 4= often, 5= always. Finally, respondents were asked to provide the following demographic data: year of birth, gender, education, ethnicity and employment status.

Results

This study utilized a cross sectional sample of N= 172 (men=75; women= 97). The age of the male respondents ranged between 18- 82 years and for women ranged between 20- 82 years. Among the respondents, 15 were High School Graduates, 15 were Licensed or Certificate holders, 62 were College graduates, 6 were Associate's Degree holders, 47 were Bachelor's Degree holders, 19 were Post graduates and higher. The ethnicity of majority respondent (n=148) was White / Caucasian (not Hispanic) and rest of the 24 respondents belonged to other ethnic groups.

Data was analyzed using Pearson's correlation, chi-square and multiple regression. Chi-square performed to test H1 demonstrated that gender had a significant effect on BD, $\chi^2(4, N = 172) = 9.92, p < 0.05$. To test H2 and H3 Pearson's correlation was utilized. The results failed to support H2, where the relationship between gender and self-esteem failed to demonstrate statistical significance ($r = 0.043, n.s$); whereas results found support for H3, demonstrating that increase in age inversely related to self-esteem ($r = -0.22, p < 0.05$). Finally multiple regression utilized to test H4 indicated that the model was statistically significant [$F(3, 168) = 20.81, p < 0.001$]; though, the results failed to support H4. Age failed to demonstrate a statistically significant effect on BD ($\beta = 0.058, n.s$) while controlling for self-esteem and gender effects. A post hoc revealed that gender failed to demonstrate a significant relationship with self-esteem.

The findings suggest that low self-esteem among both genders is significantly related to an increase in BD. Although an increase in chronological age was not associated with a decrease in BD, a negative relationship between chronological age and self-esteem was identified. Thus, the findings of this study raise the question, „Could satisfaction with one's appearance positively impact overall self-esteem among younger individuals more than for older individuals?“ Furthermore, it is likely that higher self-esteem among younger individuals is inflated due to lack of life experience and failure. As individuals grow older, they may develop a more realistic sense of self-esteem based on richer life-experiences and realistic expectations regarding success and failure. Future research should examine the changes in appearance evaluation and how it may determine self-efficacy when performing certain critical tasks over an individual's life-span.

References

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